

631 recognized over 100 chiefdoms, mustering anything from 100 to 3,000 adult men apiece.

769 Although no centralized political authority existed before the
631 German occupation, certain groups of chiefdoms joined in common rituals directed to common ancestors. We traced four such centres of worship among the Nyakyusa; the most important being Lubaga, in the middle of the valley, where Kinga priests (from the top of the Livingstone mountains) join with many Nyakyusa chiefdoms in sacrifice to Lwembe, who is claimed as the ancestor both of the chiefs of the Nyakyusa proper, and of the Kinga. At LiKyalu, on the Lake-shore plain, Kinga also join in sacrifice with the surrounding Nyakyusa chiefdoms. In Ngonde the chief connected with a similar centre of worship, Mbande, developed far-reaching secular as well as religious powers; and by the time the Europeans arrived he was established as a paramount chief with the title of the Kyungu. This development was
[439] directly connected with the fact that Ngonde traded with the outside world, and that their Kyungu, through his control of ivory, was able also to control the guns and cloth which came into the country;¹ the Nyakyusa, remaining isolated, remained politically disunited.

Besides sacrificing to a distant ancestor in company with the representatives of a large group of chiefdoms, two or more chiefs who are neighbours participate in a sacrifice at the grove in which their common father, or grandfather, is buried. Thus common worship links both large groups of chiefdoms, whose chiefs are more or less distantly related, and small groups of contiguous chiefdoms whose chiefs are close kinsmen. The sacrifices made are to the chiefs of immediately preceding generations, and to certain great heroes of the distant past, such as Lwembe and Kyalu.

769 All these sacrifices are believed to bring rain and fertility, for
789 the well-being of each chiefdom is thought to be bound up with the health of the chief and the goodwill of his ancestors.

173 The Nyakyusa are all agreed that their chiefs, *abanyafyale*, are
622 'strangers' who came down from the Livingstone mountains
563 eight or ten generations ago, and found the valley already occupied by people who had no knowledge of fire, but ate their food raw. The chiefs brought fire with them—some say, cattle also;

¹ Godfrey Wilson, *op. cit.*, pp. 9, 39-48.

INTRODUCTORY

13

and by virtue of this great benefit were accepted as chiefs. Such is the myth (*vide infra*, p. 26). It is remembered that the chiefs of different groups such as the Nyakyusa proper, the Kukwe, the Lugulu, and the Saku arrived at different times, but of the proportion of the immigrants to the former occupants, and of the proportion of men to women in the invading groups, we learnt nothing. Some suggest that the chiefs were lighter in colour than the previous inhabitants of the valley,¹ and the term *abatitu*, 'black people', is used for commoners as contrasted with chiefs. But chiefs intermarry freely with commoners and there is no observable difference in physical type between them and their people to-day. The Nyakyusa are without a clan system, and though kinship with a chief may be remembered for three (or perhaps even four) generations, the body of 'kinsmen of the chief' is not defined as it is in tribes which have a 'royal clan' like the Bemba or Pondo. Moreover, among the Nyakyusa the chief's advisers are never his kinsmen, but commoners. Sons or grandsons of a chief are ineligible as village headmen, who are the counsellors of the chief, and who had in the past very great control over him. The contrast is made between chiefs, *abanyafyale*, on the one hand, and commoners, *amafumu*, on the other, and the leaders of villages, chosen each generation by their predecessors (*vide infra*, p. 23), are the *amafumu par excellence*.² Words from this *-fumu* root mean 'chief' in various central Bantu languages (Bemba, Tumbuka, Nyanja); and it is tempting to suppose that the *amafumu* were the old chiefs conquered by the invading *abanyafyale*, but that is only a supposition. The important point for the contemporary social structure is that the village leaders are *commoners*; that their position is not hereditary, since they are selected afresh each generation; and that formerly they had very great power over the chief. This power has diminished considerably with the development of European administration. The Nyakyusa, indeed, were astounded to be told that the British

¹ cf. Godfrey Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 10 (footnote).

² For this reason *ulifumu* was translated by Godfrey Wilson as 'great commoner', in 'An Introduction to Nyakyusa Society', *Bantu Studies*, Vol. X (1936), and other papers, but this translation has considerable difficulties, and I have preferred to translate *ulifumu* as 'village headman' in the contexts in which it means the leader of the village, and 'commoner' or 'villager' in other contexts. It must be clearly understood that 'village headman' as used in this book means something quite different from 'headman' as used by the Administration (*vide infra*, p. 258).

563 constitution (about which they asked many questions) was a
622 democratic one; for, they said, the Administration always supported the chiefs against the commoners.

621 The villages to which commoner leaders are appointed differ from all other Bantu villages of which we have knowledge in that they consist of groups of age-mates, not groups of kinsmen; boys build with contemporaries and remain with them through life; girls join the villages of their husbands at marriage; therefore relatives, other than husband and wife and young children, do not live together. Nevertheless kinship ties are important, for property circulates within the kinship group rather than within the village, and kinsmen are believed to be mystically interdependent, in a way in which fellow villagers are not. The most prized
602 possession of the Nyakyusa are cattle, for cattle enable a man to marry, to live in comfort, to gain prestige by feasting his friends; and cattle pass along the roads of kinship. They pass between brothers, and half-brothers, and the sons of brothers; between fathers and sons; and between affines. Kinsmen also participate in common rituals, praying to common ancestors, and seeking protection from mystical dangers which are thought to travel, like
[556] cattle, along the roads of kinship. Ever fearful lest a quarrel among them should bring misfortune on all, they strive to live in harmony.

[578] The range of kinship recognized varies somewhat with the status of the family concerned and the proximity and personalities of its members, but, generally speaking, economic and religious co-operation link the descendants of a common grandfather, and marriage between the descendants of a common great-grandfather is excluded. A legal marriage is effected by the passage of
[581] cattle from the groom's group to the bride's, and it is this passage which is said to create kinship (*ubukamu*), with the consequent mystical interdependence, between a man and his wife, and between the one partner in a marriage and the close kinsmen of the other. Polygyny is the ideal of every pagan, and it is made
595 possible by the ten years' difference in the average marriage age
428 of men and women. Girls are betrothed very young and finally join their husbands at puberty, while few pagan men marry under twenty-five. Inherited cattle are controlled by the older generation and polygyny is the prerogative of age. For property passes not directly from father to son, but from brother to brother,

5:Wilson E-5 (1934-1938)1938 FN17 Ngonde FN17
Nyakyusa

THE LAND RIGHTS OF INDIVIDUALS AMONG THE NYAKYUSA 15

the wealth derived from this trade enabled one of their chiefs, Kyungu, 648
to maintain himself as paramount over all Ngonde. Among his people 184
impersonal relationships thus had a greater importance. And it was, I
believe, the historical isolation of the Nyakyusa from any considerable
commercial contact with the outside world which prevented the rise
among them of a paramount chief.

To-day the Nyakyusa are in process of integration with the civilized 170
society of the world and the independence of their minute chiefdoms has 622
inevitably passed away. The traditionally sovereign chiefs have been 692
grouped in seven court districts with one chief as President of the Native
Court in each; and these seven chiefs together with the two Presidents of
the Ndali and Lambya Courts are federated, with an Appeal Court and
joint Native Treasury of their own. In the seven Native Courts most of
the traditionally sovereign chiefs are entitled to sit with their great-
commoners, and assist the President and his great-commoners in the
hearing of cases. The bulk of the legal business previously transacted
by each chief in his own country is now taken to Court, but the power of
great-commoners to settle disputes by arbitration in their separate villages
is still the basis of the legal system.

A poll tax, now (1938) fixed at 9/- per annum for adult males with no 651
additional tax for plural wives, has been introduced and chiefs are paid 622
small salaries ranging from 5/-, 10/- or 20/- a month for ordinary chiefs to
80/- or 100/- a month for the Court Presidents.

The Nyakyusa, as we have previously mentioned, consist of a number 563●
of immigrant groups who have spread among and incorporated an indige-
nous population. The main immigrant groups were three in number
and are distinguished to-day by the names of "Nyakyusa," "Kukwe"
and "Selya." As all these three groups together (including those who
are now incorporated in them) call themselves "Nyakyusa" to the outside
world, I distinguish the one group to which the name more particularly
belongs as the "Nyakyusa proper." The Nyakyusa proper live in the
plain of Mungonde and up on the higher ground as far north as Tukuyu,
the Kukwe live north of them around the base of Rungwe Mountain while
the Selya live in the east of the district, between the Nyakyusa proper
and the Kukwe, right under the will of the Livingstone Mountains.
Between the three groups there are minor differences of dialect and custom.

The extent to which the indigenous groups retain any separate
identity varies in accordance with the number of the immigrants and the
date at which they reached them, but over a large part of the district
fusion has been complete.

We have already discussed the economic relations between the 471
Nyakyusa and the Lupa gold fields which provides them with a market

THE RELATIONSHIP SYSTEMS OF THE WANGONDI AND WAHONGA TRIBES, NYASALAND.

By MEREDITH SANDERSON, M.R.C.S. F.R.G.S.

I.—THE WANGONDI.

1. THE Wangondi are a Bantu tribe inhabiting that part of Central Africa adjacent to the north-west shores of Lake Nyasa. They are a somewhat primitive people, as yet little contaminated by European civilisation; they are intensely conservative and their customs differ from those of neighbouring tribes. As a result of this conservatism their system of relationship still bears, in its nomenclature, evidence of its evolution from *exogamy* in its most primitive form, and of all Nyasaland tribes the Wangondi have probably been least influenced by contact with others. In recent history they were victimised from time to time both by Arab slavers and by the Angoni, but neither appear to have left any trace of their domination. It should be mentioned, however, that the chieftainship was usurped some 10 (11) generations ago by an adventurer who, according to tradition, came from the north-west (towards Tanganyika) and whose descendants still form the ruling caste. It may be that some new customs were introduced at this time, though this is denied by the descendants of the old nobility, who still retain a large share of influence in tribal council.

2. *Definitions*.—*ILUMBU* = "brother" to "sister," or "sister" to "brother." A man calls his elder "brother" *maluwumpu*; a younger one *wang'wau*: the same terms are used by a woman for her "sisters." All children of uncles and aunts are regarded as "brothers" and "sisters," including those of maternal uncle and of paternal aunt; those of father's elder "brother," of mother's elder "sister," and of mother's "brother," are called *wakulu*, irrespective of age.

The term *wumpu* is often used, irrespective of sex, as alternative for "brother" or "sister"; its real meaning is rather "kinsman," and it may also be used for any relative or connection except the age-classes immediately above or below that of the speaker (e.g., father or son), as it implies a degree of intimacy not permitted with those degrees. *Wumpu* means "my" (lit. "our") "kinsman"; the second and third persons are *wumpian* and *wumpye* respectively: there is no singular form.

¹ The use of inverted commas with English terms of relationship indicates that they are used in the full classificatory sense.

COMMUNAL RITUALS OF THE NYAKYUSA

two peoples are distinct. Their languages are not mutually intelligible and the Nyakyusa despise the Kinga as dirty in habit and obsequious in manner. There were two main invasions from BuKinga: (i) that of the 'sons of Lwembe' who settled south and east of Tukuyu, and (ii) that of the 'sons of Ngomale' (or Kukwe), who settled first at Kina below the northern crater of Rungwe volcano, and then at Kabale in the foothills to the south-east. Most of the present chiefs of the Nyakyusa belong to one or other of these two lineages, and the chiefs of Ngonde are claimed by both. The arrival of the chiefs of Lwembe's line may be fixed between 1560 and 1650, i.e. before the settlement at the Cape, but after the death of the first Christian martyr in what is now Rhodesia¹ and the 'sons of Ngomale' followed them some generations later (*vide infra*, genealogics pp. 3, 27; p. 94). Two of the invading heroes, Lwembe and Kyungu, became 'divine kings' whose successors claimed spiritual authority over wide areas, and the heirs of Kyungu gradually acquired temporal power also.

About the first inhabitants of the Nyakyusa valley, the *abilena*, tradition is vague; however, it is clear that they were not one people, but consisted of small, scattered, independent groups, disparate in origin. Some were very early invaders from BuKinga, others came from near Lake Rukwa and were kin to the Bungu of the Rukwa plain. They occupied an almost empty country (as their name indicates) but they found pygmy hunters² in the Rungwe forests. The invaders themselves were primarily hunters and honey-gatherers, though some, at least, of them began to cultivate millet, beans, and pumpkins. One group of early inhabitants, the Penja, which was pushed into the north-west corner of the valley, has remained relatively discrete, though for the most part they have fused with the conquerors.

It is clear that nowhere were the invaders allowed to establish themselves as tyrants since, though their descendants rule over the various chiefdoms, their authority is strictly limited by the headmen of the villages who are invariably of commoner stock. Moreover, while the most sacred persons in the country are, or before the coming of the Europeans were, 'divine kings', descendants of the original heroes, chosen by each generation to become their

¹ In 1561, cf. G. M. Theal, *Records of South-East Africa*, vol. ii, p. 126.

² The quality of relations with the Pygmies is summed up in the ironical name for them 'Where did you see me?' (*Umbwenetaga?*) The tale is that they were very sensitive about their size and the first question on meeting a Nyakyusa was always: 'Where did you see me?' The only safe reply was: 'Far, far away!'

INTRODUCTORY

3

living representatives, to take their name, and to sacrifice at their groves, it was commoner priests who chose them and, as will be seen, put them to death when it was expedient for the good of the people. It is clear, too, from what source the commoners drew their power. The invaders were supposed to have brought into the country fire, cattle, crops, and iron; they were creators, the guarantors and preservers of fertility; and it was to foster and increase fertility that men worshipped and sacrificed at the groves of the mythical heroes. The aborigines, on the other hand, without fire, without iron, and feeding on raw meat as the myth depicts them, possessed one weapon of terrible potency, witchcraft, which no chief, not even a priest of the chief's lineage, could withstand or would dare to challenge. To the Nyakyusa the essential nature of the universe, established in history and in the institutions of their society, was reciprocity, a balance between chiefs and commoners, between cattle-owners and cultivators, between the creative power of the heroes and the black anger of the witches. The idea of a chief who was a dictator was as foreign as the idea of a single omnipotent creator. Moreover, there was a multiplicity of chiefs, no single central authority.

The heroic tradition, then, accounts for the differences between the chiefs and commoners and for the remarkable equilibrium that obtains between them. It accounts also, as we shall find, for the 'coming out' ritual, at least in part. It is strangely silent, however, about the origin of what is perhaps the most striking feature of Nyakyusa social life, the system of age-villages. The absence of any link between the myths of the heroes and the founding of age-villages is the more surprising in that the pattern of age-organization almost certainly came into the valley from the north-east. Only in East Africa was government based on age groups and the handing over of power from one generation to the next celebrated by whole communities. If the system of age-villages came in with the eastern invaders why is this contribution to civilized living (for the Nyakyusa regard village life as the essence of civilization) never mentioned? The only explanation we can offer is that the age structure is not necessarily linked with chieftainship, whereas the control of cattle and iron was the basis of power, and making fire was a symbol, not only of a new chieftainship, but of the vital creative force in the body of the chief. The heroic cycle justifies the relations between chiefs and commoners, but is not concerned with other institutions of the society.